

The Figure of the Changeling: Gender Conflict in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

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Abstract

The Renaissance period was fully charged with myths and fairies. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, William Shakespeare uses both Greek and English mythology; one of this recurring fairy figures is the changeling. The changeling was the replacement fairies put when they stole a human baby. Nevertheless, Shakespeare changes its meaning completely, giving this figure a new purpose. *A Dream* is full of quarrels and disagreements between all the characters; however, this paper will focus on two couples, that is, Theseus and Hippolyta, Titania and Oberon. Both Theseus and Oberon try to impose patriarchy to both women, yet Hippolyta and Titania keep defying them. Each of their quarrels is represented differently, however the central element is the changeling. Even though the Indian boy does not appear in the play, he is the main reason why Titania and Oberon quarrel as well as the reason they stop arguing. Once the quarrel for the changeling custody between Titania and Oberon is solved, so is the battle of power between Hippolyta and Theseus. Thus, the changeling has the power to influence them, making him central in the resolution of both couples whose actions go hand in hand. In this paper I intend to tackle the means by which the changeling erases gender roles in the aforementioned couples.

Introduction

A Midsummer Night's Dream by William Shakespeare, written between 1590 and 1595 and premiered on 1605 is believed to have been written for the nuptials of a noble house (Olson 1957: 95). This play is one of the most popular and successful works and it is nowadays still performed regularly. In this play Shakespeare very cleverly plays with a lot of cultural, literary and mythological references from different cultures and periods. One of the main topics of this play and which this study focuses on is the question of gender. That is, Shakespeare plays with the dynamics of every character, setting a battle of binaries, the masculine world as opposed to the feminine one. This can be seen in the first act, where Theseus is imposing the Athenian law upon Hermia and there is not one female character present. In fact, in the first act, the discourse presented is very masculine, drawing a clear line between the feminine and the masculine. As it can be seen in the following passage, Theseus has to punish Hermia for not doing as Egeus bids her, which is, marrying Demetrius instead of Lysander. In response to Hermia's disobedience, Theseus says:

Either die the death, or to abjure
For ever the society of men
Therefore, fair Hermia, question your desires,
Know of your youth, examine well your blood,
Whether, if you yield not to your father's choice,
You can endure the livery of a nun,
For aye to be in shady cloister mewed,
To live a barren sister all your life,
Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon (1.1.66-73).

It can be seen how Theseus imposes the Athenian law, the way he controls Hermia's life. He is the only one who can decide for her in this "society of men" (1.1. 67), therefore Hermia is subjected to his will, the masculine taking control over the feminine. What is more, Shakespeare plays with the association of Greek mythology characters, such as Theseus and Egeus to evoke and inspire strong feelings of

independence and strength, because they are usually associated with dominant male figures.

The first cultural reference that is presented in Act I Scene I is the Greek myth of Theseus and Hippolyta, which gives the reader – or rather the viewer – a previous glance of how the characters are going to be. This reference is important given that it suggests what the main conflict will be about. Theseus was one of the most important heroes in Greek mythology, especially taking Plutarch's Theseus and the Minotaur as reference, which is one of the best known versions of the myth and in which it is thought Shakespeare took as a reference. Theseus was the son of Aegeus, king of Athens, and he was sent to kill the Minotaur that demanded as a tribute the life of young men and women. However, the Minotaur was hidden in the Labyrinth, hence in order not to get lost Ariadne gave him a ball of thread. Once he killed the Minotaur, he went back to Athens where he was assigned another task along with Heracles, that is, to fight against the Amazons. The Amazons were female warriors that created a matriarchal society where men were excluded governed under the queen Hippolyta. After the battle, Theseus married Hippolyta, however in some versions she is killed. Taking this myth into account, one can see that the figures presented are faithful to the original story at first. However, given that Theseus wants to marry the Queen of Amazons, a strong female character free from male domination, their relationship is not as steadfast as one could think.

The second couple presented is Oberon and Titania, both of them also known as the King and Queen of the Fairies. In Renaissance and medieval literature, Oberon was often credited to be a fairy. However, way before that, the name of Oberon carried different connotations, “‘Oberon’ or ‘Oberion’ was borne by a demon who had been frequently conjured by fifteenth- and sixteenth – century wizards, long before the title

became associated with the King of Fairies” (Keith 1973: 727). On the other hand, Titania – her name deriving from the Titans – is a synonym of Diana, the virgin goddess of nature and the moon; her character is most probably taken out of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Thus, this couple too is shown to have certain quarrels.

Even though both couples are not in any way directly related, there is no direct contact or interaction; a connection can be sensed by the way the imagery of the play is presented. Shakespeare presents us with the former couple in daytime, soon to be married in order to solve certain battle of powers. The latter couple is shown in nighttime, and in spite of being married, they quarrel over the custody of a changeling, an Indian boy. I will concentrate on this figure due to the fact that both couples never coincide until the end, specifically until the argument over the changeling’s custody is over and Theseus and Hippolyta are on safe ground. It is at the end where a complete and drastic change of behavior in every character occurs, which seems to be connected to the changeling and how he solves their differences. This figure of the changeling, therefore, is the main reason of the quarrel between Oberon and Titania yet at the same time, it is the reason why they – and therefore Theseus and Hippolyta – stop quarreling.

Thus, we are presented with two different couples that happen to mirror each other; they are two different sides of the same coin. The changeling does not appear directly in the play. However, much of the action that takes place depends on him. Many studies have been carried out about where the figure of the changeling in the play is mentioned. Nevertheless, there are just a few studies that deal with the role of the changeling and its possible meaning due to the fact that, as William Slights (1988) puts it, “The quarrel over the changeling boy is powerful but also peripheral, erratically described, and never properly resolved” (259). Thus, this study aims to investigate the role of the changeling and its impact in the gendered battle for control between the

characters aforementioned, specifically the resolution that takes place at the end of the play where the patriarchal imposition is eroded but not solved. Accordingly, my analysis will be divided into three sections. It will firstly start with a brief section in order to introduce the changeling briefly and the different discussions on his possible meaning. The second section deals with the dynamics established by Theseus and Hippolyta, and Titania and Oberon respectively and the patriarchal imposition that has been showed and directed at both women. Moving on to the third section, it will deal with the changeling in the play and its role, especially how he affects both couples, indirectly solving their differences. Finally, the fourth section will summarize my conclusions.

Chapter I: The Figure of the Changeling

In our society, and usually in literature, the presence of a child tends to be related with the symbol of innocence but also with the future adult that will constitute part of our society, as Frosch (2007) observes by saying that “Shakespeare uses him to create a symbolic presence, looming over the world of the play, of the child of the future, who is still unborn” (506). In other words, it is in early childhood when a child tends to create its own identity, which is subjected and influenced on its surroundings and parents. All these elements determine the kind of people they will become. However, in this case, we are not talking about a simple child, but about a changeling among fairies. A changeling is a figure that appears constantly in folklore tales around Europe. Originally, it was believed that fairies stole human children and replaced them with fairy ones. This myth was often used to express the anxiety of parenting first-born babies, especially the fear that the child might suffer certain disabilities or disorders. Thomas Keith’s *Ghosts and Fairies* (1973) is a fundamental study of religion, myths and magic in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, in this work he claims that, “The risk of being landed with a fairy changeling similarly reminded men of the need to look after a newborn child very carefully. A moment’s neglect might be rewarded by the substitution of a fairy child, who would grow up thin, ugly and retarded” (731).

However, in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Shakespeare does not simply follow the folklore tales but creates one of his own. In this case, Titania out of love for the changeling’s mother adopts – she does not steal, according to her – the Indian boy when the mother dies in childbirth. Interestingly enough, this character does not appear once in the play, and “there are just six direct references to the changeling boy in the text” (Slights 1988: 260), and yet he influences the most important characters of the play. These six direct references that Slights mentions are mainly made in Act II Scene I

when Puck mentions him for the first time, followed by Oberon and Titania who also refer to him in the same act and scene. Later on, Oberon mentions the Indian boy once again in Act III Scene II and finally refers to him for the last time in Act IV Scene I.

It is the Indian boy who makes Titania and Oberon change their behavior and their relationship dynamics. It might seem that the changeling, honoring his name, is the personification of the instability of life, given that he does not appear in the play and it is known of his existence through other characters. In any case, the changeling boy lives between two realms: the mortal and the immortal realm. Furthermore, he lives also between his own existence and the perception of his existence from others. This figure is one of the most ambiguous characters of the play, his nature not being specified and his role being constantly questioned given that, and quoting William C. Carroll (1985), “The unseen but suggestive changeling [...] figures as one of the chief mysteries of the play” (172).

Consequently, there have been a lot of theories about the changeling and his possible role on the play throughout the years. Paul Olson’s well-known article “*Midsummer Night’s Dream* and the Meaning of Court Marriage” mentions that maybe the figure of the changeling – as well as Bottom – is a character that fulfills Titania’s erotic games given that she represents sensual passion as opposed to Oberon’s Reason (111). Another popular opinion about the Indian’s boy role is that Shakespeare uses him just as a means to show Titania’s subjugation to the patriarchal power by rendering him to Oberon. Therefore he becomes just a plot device by creating conflict between the characters and the eventual resolution. On the other hand, Slight’s believes that the changeling is a symbolic character that expresses the indeterminacy of the play. However, according to Montrose (1983), the changeling symbolizes the connection, their bond, between Titania and the votaress; representing “an experience of female

fecundity, an experience for which men must seek merely mercantile compensations.” (72). Finally, Hendricks (1996) focuses on the Indian boy from a Postcolonial perspective, tracing the vision and concept of race.

In any case, the changeling is no longer mentioned at the end of the play, when tensions and discords between characters are allegedly solved, hence ending with every character exultant with amity. Every character of the play is satisfied with the outcome, as Helen Hackett says “The play opened, then, with female desire tragically at odds with patriarchy. It ends with female desire and patriarchy mutually satisfied” (2005: lxiii).

Chapter II: Amazons, Goddesses and the Patriarchy

In the first act of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the first scene is mainly dominated by Theseus and Egeus, both very dominant masculine figures from Greek mythology. Nevertheless, there is also another powerful character present, however silent, that is, Hippolyta, the Amazon Queen. In the Renaissance, Greek mythology was very well known, thus the reader would not only be acquainted with the myth of Theseus and his wife Hippolyta but also with the various myths that existed about the Amazons. According to Montrose,

The attitude towards the Amazons expressed in such Renaissance texts is a mixture of fascination and horror. Amazonian mythology seems symbolically to embody and to control a collective anxiety about the power of the female not only to dominate or reject the male but to create and destroy him (66).

Therefore, it does not come as a surprise when Theseus has to fight Hippolyta in order to marry her: “I wooed thee with my sword, / And won thy love doing thee injuries” (1.1.17-18). This is a very violent way to subjugate someone and it is also important to take into account the fact that by saying this, Theseus is objectifying Hippolyta, treating her like a prize he has won. According to Slights (1988), “it has become customary to discuss the reconciliation of opposites or Concordia Discors in *A Dream* in terms of a patriarchal triumph over female waywardness in the most obvious of institutional joining of opposites, holy matrimony” (267).

Thereupon, this could be understood as a punishment against her insubordination with the patriarchy and usurpation of male power. Therefore, the fact that a woman with such power does not participate in the exchange between Theseus, Egeus and Hermia, could be understood as an indication of her submission to patriarchy, however it could also be said that her silence, that is, her lack of interaction, is a kind of defiance. That is the reason why at the end of the same act, Theseus exits the scene with a “Come, my

Hippolyta. What cheer my love?" (122). Now, given that Theseus and Hippolyta are not yet married and therefore Hippolyta not yet under Theseus' control, he might feel threatened. Especially after the very masculine and patriarchal exchange where Hermia has been objectified and claimed as her father's property and that he might do as he pleases with her, "As she is mine, I may dispose of her" (1.1.142). This, from the point of view of an Amazonian warrior such as Hippolyta, might seem unacceptable and outrageous, especially when Theseus says:

To you your father should be as a god;
One that composes your beauties – yea, and one
To whom you are but as a form in wax
By him imprinted, and within his power
To leave the figure or disfigure it. (1.1.47-51)

This is important because it is a demonstration of the importance of men in the conception of children while ignoring the role of women, hence it is a very patriarchal declaim. Women are essential in order to be able to have children, and in fact, they are the first parental figure that children depend upon, therefore being the first ones to nurture them. However, in this exchange here presented, women have no say whatsoever in their child's future, in fact, there is not one mother present. Thus, the first act is a representation of the masculine realm and patriarchal power.

After this act the reader is transported to the woods when darkness has descended. However, an important element takes over the darkness of the night and that is the moon, which is constantly present since Act I Scene I. It is first mentioned when Theseus wanting to marry soon, complains saying "Four happy days bring in / Another moon - but O, methinks how slow / this old moon wanes!" (2-4), therefore becoming a symbol of love. On the other hand, Hippolyta in her answer to Theseus plea, says

Four days will quickly steep themselves in night;
Four nights will quickly dream away the time;
And then the moon - like to a silver bow

New-bent in heaven - shall behold the night
Of our solemnities (1.1.7-11),

hence and to quote Stephens (2011), “Hippolyta’s figurative linking of the moon with her former position as reigning Amazonian archer establishes the significance of the moon as the symbolic specter of unruly femininity, foreign [...] in the sense of an allusion to a world beyond the strictures of patriarchy” (17). However at the same time, this “silver bow / New-bent in heaven” (1.1.9-10), might also be interpreted as a parallelism of Hippolyta’s situation, that is, a forced position of submission.

The moon might symbolize a variety of things, each depending on the period we focus on. In this case, it is a representation of the goddess Diana, “the virgin huntress and jealous guardian of chastity” (Schanzer 1955: 238). Similarly, another important thing, as mentioned in the introduction,

One of the many binaries explored [...] is the tension between natural forces and patriarchal control. Natural forces, including cyclicity, like the moon’s waxing and waning, associated with menstruation and ovulation, and rituality, like the observance of folkloric rites, are feminized forces, represented by Diana/the moon, the rites of May and the maypole, and Hecate (Goddard 2013: 2).

Thus, it would be appropriate to point out that in this case, the moon is a very feminine symbol. Nighttime is the time in which passions, imagination and dreams awaken from the slumber of daylight. Thus, if we are to believe that reason is masculine and passion is feminine, the reader is immersed in the feminine realm. According to William Slights, after Act I “the male authority figures, Egeus and Theseus, cease to exert their powers of constraint [...]” (268).

Consequently, entering a world where maternal power is more powerful than the male imposition showed in Athens. In this second act of the play, in which every action bound to happen occurs in nighttime, the reader is introduced to a series of fairy characters, essentially the King and Queen of the Fairies, and Puck. Like day and night, these couples act like two sides of the same coin, they act like a mirror. Therefore every

action and reaction that will take place during the night carried by the King and the Queen, will affect both Theseus and Hippolyta.

The first interaction between the married couple takes place in the first scene of the second act. It starts with an argument between Oberon and Titania regarding the changeling Titania took under her protection. Since the first exchange between them, it is clear that Titania has no intention to follow Oberon's biddings as Hendricks points out, "Titania's unwillingness to give the boy to Oberon may therefore be more than an example of maternal feelings; it may also echo the [...] woman's challenge to [...] patriarchal assumptions about control of the female body" (58). Moreover, she has established a hierarchy of her own, a matriarchy of sorts, disregarding Oberon's: "[...] Titania has rebelled and established her own realm of female power on the woods." (Frosch 2007: 487). Furthermore, from the first exchange between Oberon and Titania, he depicts her as a "rash wanton!" (2.1.63), with a later "Am I not thy lord?" in the same line. This shows how far Titania is out of Oberon's control from a marital point of view and how little she cares, and "Nothing threatens a patriarchal and hierarchic social formation more than a promiscuous womb" (Margareta de Garzia, 1999, cited in Stephens, 2011: 1). Notwithstanding, in order to subdue Titania under Oberon's patriarchal rule, he decides to punish her. In the same way Hippolyta is punished for her independence by marrying Theseus; Titania is punished for her disobedience by making her fall for Bottom, as Slights observes, "Titania is forced to see the folly of her infatuation with the changeling boy by being made to fall in love with a second and more monstrous changeling [...]" (267).

However, even though Titania is humiliated by it, once again Oberon finds himself displaced when he realizes that she does not need him, consequently making the prank turn against him. Moreover, not only does Titania replace Oberon once again with

Bottom, but she also takes control of the situation. In other words, when she says “Out of this wood do not desire to go! / Thou shalt remain here, whether thou wilt or no” (3.1.143-144), she imposes her authority, forcing him to stay with her, hence, creating once again a matriarchal society of her own. Thereupon, patriarchal power exerted in Act I, collapses in Act II, where a more matriarchal society takes place. In fact, this reversal of roles becomes more explicit with Titania’s speech about the votaress of her order and her child. Thus, quoting Montrose,

The notion of maternity implied in Titania’s speech counterpoints the notion of paternity formulated by Theseus in the opening scene. In Theseus’ description, neither biological nor social mother [...] plays a role in the making of a daughter; in Titania’s description, neither *genitor* nor *pater* plays a role in the making of a son (72, original italics).

Therefore, Shakespeare presents us with two different points of view about gendered relationships. In each speech of both Theseus and Titania, their gender roles are defined and build around their children. Furthermore, at the end, each party reacts in amity because Titania and Oberon’s dispute is resolved through the changeling boy, which will be further explained in the next section.

Chapter III: Gender Conflict and the Changeling

It is unavoidable even to a masterpiece to be influenced by the context in which it is written. Therefore it is important to keep in mind that Shakespeare wrote *A Midsummer Night's Dream* under the patriarchal influence of his period. Thus, and as it has been mentioned before, there was a certain order and hierarchy when it came to child custody. In the Elizabethan Era, there was a clear and established way as to how bring children up. The delimitation might be slightly present nowadays, that is, boys were usually brought up by the father, joining him in their hunt parties; girls on the other hand stayed at home along with the mother. Consequently, women had the child during the first years yet if the child was a boy, he would eventually be claimed by the father and taken away from his mother's care. Therefore, according to what has been said above, patriarchal authority has the ultimate say on matters such as politics, female existence, marriage and child custody. Notwithstanding, as previously explained, Titania rejects this patriarchal dynamic and gives her full attention to the changeling boy rather than to Oberon. It would be adequate to first explain how Titania acquires the changeling boy, keeping him under her protection. Thus, as Titania explains in Act II, Scene I:

His mother was a vot'ress of my order,
And in the spiced Indian air, by night,
Full often hath she gossip'd by my side,
And sat with me on Neptune's yellow sands,
Marking th'embarked traders on the flood;
When we have laugh'd to see the sails conceive
And grow big-bellied with the wanton wind;
Which she, with pretty and with swimming gait,
Following (her womb then rich with my young squire)
Would imitate, and sail upon the land
To fetch me trifles, and return again,
As from voyage, rich with merchandise.
But she, being mortal, of that boy did die,
And for her sake do I rear up her boy;
And for her sake I will not part with him. (2.1.124-137)

From Titania's point of view, she adopts the boy due to the bonding between her and the votaress. It is out of love to the votaress that she decides to take care of her child. However, according to Puck, Titania steals the boy: "Because that she as her attendant hath / A lovely boy stolen from an Indian king. / She never had so sweet a changeling" (2.1.21-23). It is interesting to notice how Puck at the same time does not consider the link between Titania and the changeling as a mother-and-son bonding, as Titania might be regarded when she adopts him, but rather he calls the Indian boy her attendant, hence disregarding maternal relationship. In fact, Puck might regard their relationship as such because as Martha E. Goddard (2013) very well explains, "Titania's having stolen the boy from an Indian king - as a female claiming a male's property and offspring and 'perforce' withholding him - represents a major female challenge to male power (2.1.26)" (5).

The fact that Puck considers the boy as the attendant of Titania is a very masculine and patriarchal view, given that at that time, a boy's education began as a henchman. What is more and quoting Goddard, "Oberon would have the changeling boy engage in 'manly' performance as a "knight of his train, to trace the forests wild" (2.1.25)" (5). However, according to Hendricks, "As the text presents it, Titania's interest in the boy is sentimental, linked to her relationship with his mother and the promise the fairy queen made. Oberon's interest, on the other hand, is textually more ambiguous" (53). Furthermore, in Titania's description of the events, the father of the child is not mentioned at all, he is completely unknown and there is no indication to suggest that it might be a king. On the other hand, during the conversation between Titania and the votaress, along with Titania's soliloquy mentioned before, there is not one male figure; they do not care about the father. On the other hand, Puck's reaction tells us that he only cares about the Indian king, but not about the mother. This indicates

the dynamics and difficulties to reconcile gender roles, one tries to control the other. This introduces the reader to this opposition and division between the feminine and the masculine, the rivalry between binaries. This opposition will be aggravated due to the battle for the custody of the changeling; hence it is the Indian boy who has the power to control them given that he is the reason of the quarrel. Their actions are driven by the desire to take care of him in the case of Titania, or to possess him in the case of Oberon. However, as Hendricks pointed out, “Oberon’s desire for the boy seems very much connected to the desire for dominion over Titania” (53), in the same way Titania’s possession of the changeling is connected with her matriarchy, as well as her friendship, with the Indian boy’s mother.

Due to the fact that the changeling is not the biological child of Oberon and Titania, Oberon feels excluded because of his lack of power or authority over the child. However Titania does have control over the child as Goddard observed, “In scaping patriarchal control, and, in a sense, creating a child together without male involvement, the women have also escaped patriarchal valuation. The human mother and Titania are ‘rich’ in a way unquantifiable by patriarchal standards, likened” (8). Therefore, Oberon as the embodiment of the masculine world has no place between the maternal relationship between child and mother. What is more, the reason why Titania decides to adopt the changeling is because of the feminine relationship between the votaress and the Queen. The changeling, in a way, belongs or is a product of this feminine world that Oberon tries to subdue and dominate. Had he inseminated her himself, he would have power over her, it could be interpreted as a demonstration of his masculine potency. Nevertheless, the child is the product of another woman – with no husband that we know of – who shared a strong feminine relationship with the Fairy Queen. Therefore, Titania asserts her matriarchal authority using the Indian boy; Oberon, on the other

hand, tries to attain control over Titania by trying to make the changeling his personal page. Consequently, with this, the changeling has become the physical proof of their quarrel of gender roles.

If we go back to what it has been said about the moon in the last chapter, it would be interesting to draw attention to the fact that there is a certain parallelism between the moon, the play and the changeling, as Montrose points out: “like the moon, the play is full of transitions” (67). That is to say, the moon, as well as the changeling, is constituted of transitions and constant change, never remaining the same. As it has been mentioned in the chapter above, it is at night that everything is blurred; every social structure, patriarchal authority and, essentially, any limitation and imposition cease to exist as a law and changes. It is at night when visions and dreams take place; hence, it is reasonable to think that Shakespeare is experimenting with gendered relations and uses the changeling as the solution of this quarrel. The Indian boy is the transition to the patriarchal society present in Athens, to a future society that is willing to engage with both patriarchal and matriarchal societies without excluding each other completely.

Shakespeare experiments with the patriarchal hierarchical power established in Athens with Theseus and Egeus, reversing it to a matriarchy. The Indian boy is the link between Titania and Oberon - and therefore, between Theseus and Hippolyta -, he is the chain that connects them. Taking this into account, the changeling is at the same time the link between patriarchy and matriarchy, both extremes presented as diametrically opposed, expressed by appearing in daylight and in nighttime. In addition, the moon is characterized by its changing phases, it never stays the same. This instability is also present in the Indian child, who happens to be a changeling, deliberately associated with change. This is extremely relevant because throughout the play, we see that it is all about change and transition. Shakespeare plays with day and night, with the movements

of the moon, “The changeling is the figure that shows how everything changes, moves, transfigures: start vs. end of the play. How the characters transform, how the moon transform, day vs. night. In *A Dream*, there is a transition in the male and female life cycles” (Montrose 1983: 66).

Moreover, it is important to acknowledge the fact that the changeling is not just a boy, but an Indian one. This, of course, has raised a lot of discussion among scholars not only because it makes him even more distant than his physical absence, but also because it gives the chance to apply the Post-Colonial literary theory. If the figure of the changeling is analyzed from a Post-Colonial point of view, it could be said that the oppressor tries to control and assert dominance over the Other, that is, the Indian boy. In other words, the hegemonic society attempts to control the non-hegemonic or the voiceless. In this case, the only non-hegemonic character here is the Indian boy, who has no voice - it has been silenced through the play -, no identity, and to certain extent is weak and ignorant due to his blissful innocence. This leads to the question Hendricks asked, “if critical tradition is correct that all the fairies of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* are taken from English folklore, why not identify the changeling as the English boy?” (41). Colonialism as well as patriarchy is a problem that has been present for a long time, it is a fight to steal and possess the Other, just as the patriarchy seeks to possess and control women. Shakespeare is linking both concepts, which are gender and colonialism, given that the Indian boy is, according to Hendricks, a mestizo, a mix of ethnicities. Therefore, “race is all this and is nothing: a shaping fantasy” (Hendricks 1996: 42), just as gender dynamics presented in the play are constantly changing, a social construct. In the first act of the play, women, femininity and motherhood are seen as something different, distant, foreign, the same way Colonialism sees the Other:

The presence of foreign "otherness" [...] can be seen as a further attempt to challenge the assumed stability of gender as controlled by specific patriarchal societies. Bringing these broad observations together, it becomes possible to see the themes of procreation, androgyny, and foreignness weave and blend together throughout these diverse texts to suggest a reformulation of gendered relations (Stephens 2011: 2).

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare established a parallelism between patriarchy and colonialism. The changeling has to be an Indian in order to evoke the image of the colonialism. The Indian boy in this case has become the personification of what the patriarchy does to women, appropriating them as objects, trading them and controlling them, especially in Act I set in Athens. At the same time, it evokes the idea of the Other, that can also be interpreted as how patriarchy holds in consideration motherhood throughout the entire play, that is, something alien to them.

It could be said that the changeling stands as the symptom of the quarrel between Oberon and Titania, and as mentioned in the introduction, they are the representation of both the masculine and the feminine worlds. At the same time, the Indian boy is the outcast that will solve their differences, and he has to be a non-hegemonic child, he has to be an outsider because he cannot be constricted by the laws established by the hegemonic society. Furthermore, the changeling is a boy under the protection of a feminine figure. Since his birth he has been inside of what should be described as the feminine sphere longer than it is considered acceptable considering Oberon's reaction. Thus, if the child will eventually represent and build the future society of Athens, he has to become both extremes. He is a male who has spent too much time under the care of a feminine figure, he can reconcile the opposites, and he has become the unification of both sides. The child is not exclusively male but a representation of both male and female, and maybe that is why he has to be a child, because they are not yet sexualized and they are not yet under the control of gender roles, they are seen as androgynous. At the same time, the figure of the changeling, a

child, might suggest the fact that we need mothers, not only fathers as seen in the first act, and not only when we are children, but when we are adults too. Thus, at the end of the play, when the sun rises, the reader is guided towards Athens once again where the marriage ceremony of Theseus and Hippolyta has to take place. Nevertheless, something has changed, there is no more tension between Hippolyta and Theseus, there is no more quarreling between Titania and Oberon. This sudden change might be due to the changeling and its resolution that takes place before the end of the night and the beginning of a new day.

However, this change of attitude is caused by an action of Titania that might be controversial for the interpretation of this new found amity between the couples. Thus, it is important to comment on this following passage when Titania, under the effect of Cupid's flower, gives the changeling to Oberon:

When I had at my pleasure taunted her,
And she in mild terms begged my patience,
I then did ask of her her changeling child,
Which straight she have me, and her fairy sent
To bear him to my bower in Fairyland (4.1.56-60).

This is the key moment when the changeling is handed to Oberon at last. However, if we follow what has been said about this fragment, we should interpret this scene as Titania's final submission. As McPeck (1972) explains, "Oberon-Cupid rejects the dominance of Titania-Venus, and taking the Indian boy [...], he becomes truly Titania's lord, and the contention is over" (74). Nevertheless, at the same time there are other interpretations countering the previous one made by McPeck, such as this one,

Like Helena, Hermia, and Hippolyta, she is taught that the only true concord for the sexes requires her to acknowledge the central fact of benign male superiority in a patrilineal-patrilogical culture. Titania, in fact, acknowledges nothing of the kind when she gives up the changeling boy. All she says is that she now loathes the sight of the transfigured Bottom. It can be argued, then, that in its pursuit of comic conflicts Shakespeare's play does more to unsettle than to inscribe traditional assumptions of courtly culture concerning marriage (Slights 1988: 267).

The true meaning of Titania's action shall remain a mystery, however Oberon accepts the changeling as hers as he admits the boy to be "her changeling" (4.1.58). The fact that he considers the changeling as something of her property is a very daring thing to say given that he acknowledges Titania's power over the changeling. Consequently, it could be said that Titania does not accept Oberon's superiority, but rather, they acknowledge that both of them are to be part of the Indian boy. As a consequence of this new amity between Titania and Oberon, Theseus is not so harsh applying the Athenian law over Hermia. In this new day, the lovers are allowed to marry the ones they love when Theseus says to Egeus: "I will overbear your will" (4.1.178). Therefore, patriarchal imposition and laws have changed, however they have not disappeared. Furthermore, at the end of Act IV, Scene I, Theseus refers to Hippolyta calling her by saying "Come, Hippolyta" (185). It is important to notice that unlike the first act, there is no longer the possessive "my" nor the "what cheer?" (1.1.122). This might be due to this new benevolence, to the fact that there is no longer any intention to possess the female body as before, now we are presented with a new concord of opposites. Therefore, the changeling is both used as a measure to show the quarrel for possession over the female body, but also he is a symbolic figure of the reconciliation of opposites, the symptom personified as a non-hegemonic child that is constantly silenced as the gender roles problem constantly is. It could be interpreted that not only, according to Hendricks, the changeling is blurring the fantasy of race but also unifies what is masculine and feminine. He has become the solution by unifying. Even though the changeling has no voice, Shakespeare has given him the power to control the hegemonic characters, he has given the changeling the opportunity to solve this dichotomy by showing them that they are not mutually exclusive, but

rather, complementary. That is, one cannot exist without the other, and this can only be shown by a mestizo, non-hegemonic child who will constitute future societies.

In the Elizabethan fairy mythology, a changeling was the substitution for a human newborn baby, a replacement. Thus, it would be interesting to consider this entire play as a substitution of the concept of true love, ideas, attitudes, and the patriarchy; a mutability of beliefs. In order to solve certain social problems, it is needed to change constantly, adapting to new times and with each adaptation, solving social injustices, reshape our conventions. This is the reason why the end is more engaged with the feminine world, the differences between each couple have been eroded. However the problem is not totally solved; if anything, it is only a step towards a solution, the borders so well defined at the beginning of the play have ceased to exist at the end of it.

Conclusions

“The story will be changed:
Apollo flies, and Daphne holds the chase.”
(2.1.230-231)

It has been established the original meaning of the changeling in the English folklore, which is a replacement of a human baby for a fairy one. However, throughout this paper it has been explained that Shakespeare plays not only with the figure of the changeling but also with what the changeling represents and his agency in the play, redefining his original meaning. Thus, the Indian boy is not taking the place of any human boy, far from that, he is the product of a collision, yet at the same time he is the solution of this clash. Notwithstanding, the changeling is not a conventional character due to the fact that he does not appear in the play and there are few direct references to him. However, it has been shown that he is a direct influence, a personification of the quarrel in which he is also the solution.

At the beginning of the play, the reader is presented with a portrayal of the Elizabethan women's reality exemplified with Hippolyta being forced to marry Theseus as a punishment for being both independent from patriarchal rule and for being a threat to it. Later on, another couple is presented in which Titania presents once again a threat towards male control over women. The only difference between both couples is that the first one appears in daylight and the second one in nighttime respectively. However, it is with the second couple and in the night when Shakespeare plays and experiments with the gendered roles established in Athens society. He does so at night and outside the city, in the forest, when civilization and laws have no value or real consequences. The second couple could be interpreted as an exteriorization of the former one without the constraints of the patriarchy, hence the actions of one, might affect the other. Therefore,

the changeling, who has the power to direct the character's action, not only has an impact upon Titania and Oberon, but also towards Theseus and Hippolyta indirectly.

Thus, when at night Titania, as well as Hippolyta in her Amazonian society, tries to redefine gender roles creating a matriarchy it is done using the changeling. He represents both women's power as well as Oberon's desire to possess Titania. Due to the fact that he represents the consolidation of both masculine and feminine worlds, he blurs the line of gender roles and patriarchal hierarchy. When both Titania and Oberon acknowledge each other as equals in terms of the child's custody, the changeling automatically disappears. At the same time, Theseus acknowledges Hippolyta as such by hunting with her. Notwithstanding, all this does not mean that patriarchy has been defeated, far from that, patriarchy is still present in the Athenian society, as Puck says just before the new-found amity between each other "Jack shall have Jill; / Naught shall go ill. / The man shall have his mare again, and all shall be well" (3.2.461-463). Therefore, once again men are portrayed treating women as a mere object, like a horse, a possession to be acquired. Ultimately, even though patriarchy has not disappeared, its delimitations and impositions have been blurred and eroded because the changeling has become the embodiment of both parties, the chain that links both variables. The Indian boy shows that both extremes need to be united, one is the product of the other and vice versa, hence they cannot exclude each other, they cannot exist without each other. The changeling shapes their relationship as men and women, and as they change so does the changeling by disappearing, therefore showing the result of his work. He is the future child; he embodies a small step in the right direction.

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